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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media, except Jerusalem Post, led with the consequences of PM Sharon's meeting with President Bush Wednesday. Israel Radio reported that Sharon returned from Washington this morning (Israel Time). Israel Radio quoted senior GOI sources as saying that Sharon could visit the U.S. again in a few weeks. The station reported that the Israeli Embassy in Washington will invite Sen. John Kerry to Israel, following Sharon's inability to meet with him in the U.S. due to a tight schedule.

Ha'aretz's and Jerusalem Post's Washington correspondents write that Thursday the U.S. Administration tried to soften the pro-Israeli tone of Bush's statement and dampen the impression that U.S. policy has tilted in favor of Israel. Ha'aretz's Washington correspondent cited the belief of the Sharon and Bush teams that the shock waves which will convulse the PA leadership as a result of Bush's letter will foster a new leadership among Palestinians. Israel Radio quoted Secretary of State Colin Powell as saying Thursday [in interviews with foreign news outlets] that the U.S. does not want to prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations, and that modifications to the 1949 armistice lines have to be mutually agreed upon by the two parties as part of the road map process. The Secretary noted that Bush has recognized the reality of changes that have taken place in the West Bank. The radio quoted State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher as saying: "There is no change in U.S. policy on settlements." The radio and Yediot cited the New York Times and Washington Post's editorials that expressed reservations about the switch in the U.S. stance. Israel Radio noted that the major U.S. media are not buying U.S. "adjustments" to Bush's remarks or to his letter to Sharon.

Yediot, Maariv and Ha'aretz published the full text of the "disengagement document" that will be presented to Likud members before the upcoming party referendum, slated for May 2. Yediot also printed senior Sharon aide Dov Weisglass' letter to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, which details Israel's position regarding Sharon's plan.

Both Yediot and Maariv commissioned polls among Likud registered voters:
-The Yediot poll, conducted by Mina Zemach's Dahaf Institute found that 54 percent of Likud voters will vote for Sharon's plan; 38 percent are opposed; 8 percent are undecided. (Another Mina Zemach poll found that 68 percent of the general public support the plan, while 26 percent are opposed to it.)
- The Maariv/Teleseker poll found that 49.4 percent of Likud registered voters favor Sharon's plan; 38.4 percent are opposed to it; 12.2 percent are undecided. Among those who declared they will definitely vote on May 2, 51.6 percent will support Sharon's plan; 40.3 percent will vote against it; 8.1 percent are undecided.

Yediot reported that Sharon promised in a closed meeting with senior members of the U.S. media that the disengagement from Gaza was only a first step and that settlements in the West Bank will also be dismantled. Israel Radio quoted a senior member in Sharon's

entourage as saying that Israel is interested in transferring property it will abandon in the Gaza Strip to responsible PA elements, and that Israel will negotiate the issue with international bodies such as the World Bank and the countries contributing to the PA, but that Israel would pull down those buildings, should the consequences of the move be inconsistent with Israel's interests. The radio quoted another member of Sharon's delegation as saying that after the withdrawal from Gaza is completed -- in late April 2005 -- there will be no further withdrawal except from the "Philadelphia axis" along the northern part of the Israel/Egypt border (in the second phase of Israel's disengagement).

Ha'aretz reported that Sharon's son, Knesset Member Omri Sharon, canvassed Likud members during his father's trip to the U.S., warning them that if the disengagement plan is not approved in the referendum, PM Sharon might resign and the Likud could lose its hefty share of its 40 Knesset seats in the next national elections. Yediot quoted associates of Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu as saying that he is waiting for clarifications from Sharon, but that he is presently inclined to vote against the plan. Yediot reported that former cabinet minister Benny Begin (the son of the late PM Menachem Begin) has broken a five-year-long political silence and that he is joining the fight against the withdrawal plan. Maariv reported that Sharon associates and the Labor Party have agreed that should the right-wing parties leave the coalition, Labor would provide a "safety net" to the government. Maariv writes that Labor's joining the government would depend on whether Sharon is indicted on criminal charges for alleged corruption.

Leading media reported that in response to the exchange of letters between Bush and Sharon, PA Chairman Yasser Arafat Thursday reiterated Palestinian commitment to the establishment of a state whose capital is Jerusalem, and to the right of return for refugees to their original places of residence. Taisir Nasrallah, one the signatories of a statement issued Thursday by the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Palestinian Refugees, an umbrella organization representing refugees from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, told Ha'aretz Thursday that Bush's decision constitutes another Nakba (catastrophe) for the Palestinians. The group's statement compares Bush's letter with the "unrealistic" attitude exhibited by the signers of the Geneva Accord, the Ami Ayalon-Sari Nusseibeh peace initiative and the polling institute headed by Khalil Shikaki, which a year ago released a poll saying a large percentage of refugees do not believe that they will ever return to Israeli territory.

Israel Radio reported that Thursday at a press conference with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, British PM Tony Blair stated that he attaches great importance to Sharon's disengagement plan, and that he calmed those who fear that it could damage the road map. Ha'aretz quoted French President Jacques Chirac as saying that the plan is "dangerous" and that it constitutes a "dangerous precedent," as it results in a change in political borders, which the EU is opposed to.

Maariv reported that in the next few weeks the security forces will dismantle 28 illegal settler outposts in the West Bank, which are inhabited by a total of 240 families. The media reported that two outposts were dismantled Thursday. All media reported that Thursday A-G Menachem Mazuz ordered the Housing and Construction Ministry to freeze all allocations to local councils in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The order came in response to the yet to be published State Comptroller's report which indicates that the ministry gave tens of millions of shekels (one shekel roughly equals USD 0.22) to support illegal settlement activity. All media reported that Meretz MK Haim Oron welcomed the ministry's decision, whereas right-wing politicians condemned it as a political decision.

All media reported that Thursday, near Ariel in the West Bank, IDF troops arrested a Palestinian woman carrying a 25-kg explosive device. The woman is a mother of six. Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Thursday 35 Palestinians were wounded in clashes with security forces during protests against the construction of the separation fence at Biddu village, northwest of Jerusalem.

Ha'aretz announced that David Landau has become its Editor-in-Chief. Tami Litani has been named the newspaper's Deputy Editor, replacing Yoel Esteron.

Taking over from Landau, South-African born Peter Hirschberg was appointed Editor of the newspaper's English Edition.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Seizing the diplomatic initiative and shaking past positions were the key to achieving an understanding with Bush, and served Sharon better than his earlier insistence on maintaining the status quo until the Palestinians change and start fighting terrorism."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "It was clear to the Palestinian leadership Thursday that Bush's support of Sharon's disengagement plan was the death knell for the road map."

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar opined in Ha'aretz: "The political, military, and economic aspects of the plan for the Gaza Strip and the enclave in the northern West Bank are amazingly similar to the homelands, one of the last inventions of the white minority in South Africa to perpetuate its rule over the black majority."

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Bush's letter, and indeed, Sharon's, continue to force Israel into an untenable position of having to fight terrorism while promising victory to the terrorists in the form of a state."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Apart from his 'warm remarks,' President Bush has not committed himself to anything concrete regarding Israel."

Jerusalem Post editorialized: "When prominent or popular leaders of one nation call repeatedly and openly for the extinction of another nation, it's best to take them at their word."

Block Quotes:

I. "And Now, the Real Test"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 16): "Sharon agreed to forgo low-value assets -- the settlements in the Gaza Strip and in northern Samaria [the Jenin area] -- in order to buy time and repulse pressures for a deeper withdrawal. Seizing the diplomatic initiative and shaking past positions were the key to achieving an understanding with Bush, and served Sharon better than his earlier insistence on maintaining the status quo until the Palestinians change and start fighting terrorism. He proves that he has the ability to lead the entire political system in his wake and to undermine the Palestinian contention that even if they behave well, Israel will never cede a millimeter. Sharon is trying to refute the allegation that his plan rewards terrorism and constitutes withdrawal under fire by asserting that the Palestinians have suffered a harsh blow to their dreams, citing the sharp reactions of the Palestinian Authority to the plan to prove his point. He is also delivering numerous threats about tougher Israeli responses than in the past if the Gaza-based terrorism continues."

II. "A Palestinian Authority That May Be Passe"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (April 16): "The Palestinian Authority's official responses to the 'dangerous turn' in American policy -- calls for help from all elements involved in the conflict, first and foremost the UN, Russia, and the European countries, America's partners in the Quartet, as well as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab states -- reveal helplessness. PA Chairman Yasser Arafat's speech Thursday afternoon, in which he stated that the Palestinian people will never give up their national rights was also part of

the response.... It was clear to the Palestinian leadership Thursday that Bush's support of Sharon's disengagement plan was the death knell for the road map."

III. "Creating a Bantustan in Gaza"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in Ha'aretz (April 16): "South Africa will be very interested in the Israeli disengagement plan published Thursday. The political, military, and economic aspects of the plan for the Gaza Strip and the enclave in the northern West Bank are amazingly similar to the homelands, one of the last inventions of the white minority in South Africa to perpetuate its rule over the black majority.... Only Israel and Taiwan had diplomatic connections with the homelands. Foment there deteriorated into a series of rebellions, and a decade ago the homelands became part of united South Africa, governed by a black majority."

IV. "So What Did We Get?"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 16): "Bush's letter, and indeed, Sharon's, continue to force Israel into an untenable position of having to fight terrorism while promising victory to the terrorists in the form of a state.... [Furthermore], Israel has exposed and the U.S. has reviewed mountains of evidence proving that [the PA] security services are terrorist cells and that the Palestinian Authority itself is a terrorist entity. Yet in spite of this, the U.S. continues to insist, and Israel continues to agree, that these security services should be reformed and strengthened and PA institutions supported and reinforced rather than destroyed and replaced. Finally, as has been the case since the 'land for peace' equation was coined, the demands on Israel from the exchange of letters are all concrete while the demands from the Palestinians are not. They have to reform and fight terror but there is no 'or else.' Nothing will happen to them if they don't. And as for the reform of their political institutions, there is no blueprint for how they are supposed to go about it, especially in light of the fact that the Bush administration has ruled out the option of getting rid of Yasser Arafat."

V. "The White House Meetings: Lights and Shadows"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (April 16): "The friendly remarks [Bush] made during his conversation with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon won't constitute a hindrance to him when he talks with Arab chiefs of state, given that in fact, apart from his 'warm remarks,' President Bush has not committed himself to anything concrete regarding Israel. On the contrary, Prime Minister Sharon, the man who pledged to implement the 'road map,' even without amendments, has agreed to leave the issue of Jerusalem open for a debate on the final status, and to be happy with a presidential statement about the return of refugees to a future Palestinian state, adding 'it seems clear.' Sharon pledged to 'limit the settlements'.... This is the achievement of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington."

VI. "Stage Six"

Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 16): "According to people who study such things, there are eight stages of genocide: Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Extermination and Denial. After a decade of Arafat rule, a critical mass of Palestinians hover somewhere between stages six and seven. This development, obvious to most Israelis, is rarely noticed by outside observers.... Most students of genocide would agree that when prominent or popular leaders of one nation call repeatedly and openly for the extinction of another nation, it's best to take them at their word.... We make these observations just as President Bush, in his press conference with Ariel Sharon, has repeated his call for a new Palestinian regime, devoted not only to fighting terrorism but [also] to focusing its efforts on the socio-economic welfare of the Palestinian people. When Bush first made this case, in June 2002, it was widely dismissed as unrealistic and probably counterproductive. To our mind, it remains essential. No 'peace' is worth the paper it's written on if it collapses at the first hint of weakness."